

Freedom's

A History of Independence (CVA/CV 62)

By Mike Weeks

*The venerable carrier **Independence** (CV 62) deployed to many of the world's hot spots during her 39 years of service. From the quarantine of Cuba, to Vietnam, to Operations Desert Shield and Southern Watch, **Independence** stood ready to answer the call. On 30 September 1998, "Freedom's Flagship" was decommissioned in Bremerton, Wash.*

The keel of the fourth and last *Forrestal*-class attack aircraft carrier (CVA), hull number 62, was laid on 1 July 1955 at the New York Naval Shipyard, Brooklyn, N.Y. She had been named *Independence*, the fifth ship to be so honored, on 29 March 1955. Christened by Mrs. Thomas Gates, wife of the Secretary of the Navy, the ship was launched on 6 June 1958 and on 10 January 1959 was commissioned as the nation's 15th active CVA.

Flagship





During final acceptance trials, *Independence* (CVA 62) recorded her first arrested landing when a TF-1 *Trader* trapped aboard on 2 March 1959. The following month she arrived at her new home port of Norfolk, Va., and shortly thereafter departed for a 10-week training cruise to the Caribbean with her assigned carrier air group, CVG-7.

In February 1960 *Independence* conducted carrier suitability tests for the new F4H-1 *Phantom II*. Her maiden deployment, a seven-month cruise to the Mediterranean as part of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, began on 4 August. She returned to Norfolk on 3 March 1961, spent five months stateside, then returned to the Mediterranean for a four-month deployment, which saw her and other Sixth Fleet units on increased alert because of worldwide tensions due to the construction of the Berlin Wall. Another Mediterranean deployment from April to August 1962 kept *Indy* busy.

In October 1962 *Independence* and other elements of the Second Fleet

An RA-5C *Vigilante* traps aboard *Independence* in 1965. Other planes waiting on deck include an A-6A *Intruder* (with the black nose sitting closest to the stern), which *Indy* carried to Vietnam for that aircraft's first operational deployment.

rushed to the Caribbean to support quarantine operations against Cuba following the discovery of Soviet ballistic missiles on the island. With the crisis defused, she returned to Norfolk in late November and conducted readiness exercises along the eastern seaboard, overhaul at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard and refresher training out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, into 1963. In August *Indy* once again pointed her bow eastward, and after exercises in the Bay of Biscay with British and French units, she entered the Mediterranean for a seven-month extended deployment which ended with her return to Norfolk in March 1964.

Following training exercises *Independence*, with Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 7 still aboard (air groups had been redesignated air wings on 20

December 1963), departed Norfolk on 8 September 1964 for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Teamwork exercises in the Norwegian Sea and off the coast of France and Gibraltar. During this cruise *Indy* introduced the RA-5C *Vigilante* multi-sensor reconnaissance aircraft of Reconnaissance Attack Squadron 1 to East Coast-based CVAs. She returned to Norfolk on 5 November and entered the naval shipyard for overhaul and upgrade.

Departing Norfolk on 10 May 1965 *Independence* steamed toward the South China Sea via the Cape of Good Hope to operate off Vietnam, becoming the first East Coast carrier to deploy in support of the war effort. On 1 July the first *Indy* aircraft launched against an enemy left her deck. During 97 days on station more

than 7,000 sorties were launched during an exceptional pace of day-and-night strike operations against military and logistic supply facilities in North Vietnam. However, the deployment was a costly one for CVW-7: 5 men lost in operational accidents, 4 killed in action and 9 prisoners of war.

Independence returned to Norfolk on 13 December, having accomplished several firsts during her tour in Vietnam. Her aircraft successfully evaded the first massive surface-to-air missile (SAM) barrage in Naval Aviation history while attacking assigned targets, and executed the first successful attack on an enemy SAM installation. She also had on board the new Grumman A-6A *Intruder* long-range all-weather air-

craft of Attack Squadron 75 for that aircraft's first operational deployment.

In May 1966 *Independence* hosted carrier suitability tests for the tri-service Hawker Siddeley P.1127 *Kestrel* (XV-6A), an early vertical and short takeoff and landing jet which was a forerunner to the AV-8 *Harrier*. She departed in June for an eight-month deployment to the Med as part of the Sixth Fleet.

Most of 1967 was spent at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard for a 10-month extensive overhaul, *Indy's* longest since commissioning. Near the end of refresher training in early

1968 the carrier reached a major milestone on 27 March when the F-4J crew of exchange pilot Captain R. F. Charrier, USAF, and Naval Flight Officer Lt. (jg) K. E. Corson of Fighter Squadron 84 recorded *Indy's* 100,000th arrested landing. The next month *Indy* and the squadrons of CVW-7 departed for the Mediterranean for the longest cruise of her career, which lasted a grueling

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Right, a British F-4K *Phantom* from HMS *Ark Royal* lands on "runway 62" during cross-decking exercises in 1972. Below, F-4 *Phantoms* of VF-33 fly formation over "Freedom's Flagship."



J02 Kopplin



USS *Independence* (CVA/CV 62) Major Deployments

This list provides the squadron number, type of aircraft and tail code. The tail codes include the first number of the series; the remaining series numbers are indicated by Xs.

Caribbean Shakedown/CVG-7

22 Apr–30 Jun 59

VF-41	F3H-2N	AG1xx
VF-11	F8U-1	AG2xx
VA-86	A4D-2	AG4xx
VA-75	AD-6	AG5xx
VAH-1	A3D-2	AG6xx
VFP-62 Det 41	F8U-1P	AG9xx
HU-2 Det 41	HUP-2	HUxx

Mediterranean/CVG-7

04 Aug 60–03 Mar 61

VF-41	F3H-2N	AG1xx
VF-84	F8U-2	AG2xx
VA-72	A4D-2	AG3xx
VA-86	A4D-2	AG4xx
VA-75	AD-6	AG5xx
VAH-1	A3D-2	AG6xx
VMA-224	A4D-2	WK8x
VAW-33 Det 41	AD-5Q	AG80x
VFP-62 Det 41	F8U-1P	AG90x
VAW-12 Det 41	WF-2	GE7xx
HU-2 Det 41	HUP-3	HUxx

Mediterranean/CVG-7

04 Aug–19 Dec 61

Same as previous cruise.

Mediterranean/CVG-7

19 Apr–27 Aug 62

VMF(AW)-115	F4D-1	AG1xx
VF-84	F8U-2	AG2xx
VA-72	A4D-2N	AG3xx
VA-86	A4D-2N	AG4xx
VA-75	AD-6	AG5xx
VAH-1	A3D-2	AG6xx
VAW-12 Det 41*	WF-2	AG7xx
VAW-33 Det 41*	AD-5Q	AG81x
VFP-62 Det 41*	F8U-1P	AG9xx
HU-2 Det 41*	HUP-3	HUxx

*became Det 62 on 01 May

Caribbean/CVG-7

(Cuban Missile Crisis)

11 Oct–26 Nov 62

VF-13	F-3B	AK1xx
VF-84	F-8C	AG2xx
VA-34	A-4C	AC3xx

18–26 Nov 62

VA-64	A-4C	AF3xx
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22 Oct–18 Nov 62

VA-72	A-4C	AG3xx
VA-75	A-1H	AG5xx
VAH-1	A-3B	AG6xx
VAW-12 Det 62	E-1B	AG7xx
VAW-33 Det 62	EA-1F	AG8xx
VFP-62 Det 62	RF-8A	AG9xx
HU-2 Det 62	UH-2A	HUxx

Mediterranean/CVG-7

06 Aug 63–04 Mar 64

VF-41	F-4B	AG1xx
VF-84	F-8C	AG2xx
VA-72	A-4C	AG3xx
VA-86	A-4C	AG4xx
VMA-324	A-4B	AG5xx
VAH-1	A-5A	AG6xx
VAW-12 Det 62	E-1B	AG73x
VAW-33 Det 62	EA-1F	AG8xx
VFP-62 Det 62	RF-8A	AG9xx
HU-2 Det 62	UH-2A	HU1x

North Atlantic/CVW-7

(NATO Teamwork)

08 Sep–05 Nov 64

VF-41	F-4B	AG1xx
VF-62	F-8E	AG2xx
VA-72	A-4E	AG3xx
VA-86	A-4E	AG4xx
RVAH-1	RA-5C	AG60x
VAH-11 Det 8	A-3B	AG61x
VAW-12 Det 62	E-1B	AG7xx
VAW-33 Det 62	EA-1F	AG8xx
VFP-62 Det 62	RF-8A	AG9xx
HU-2 Det 62	UH-2A	HUxx

Vietnam/CVW-7

10 May–13 Dec 65

VF-41	F-4B	AG1xx
VF-84	F-4B	AG2xx
VA-72	A-4E	AG3xx
VA-86	A-4E	AG4xx
VA-75	A-6A	AG5xx
RVAH-1	RA-5C	AG60x
VAW-13 Det 1	EA-1F	VR70x
VAW-12 Det 62	E-1B	AG71x
VAH-4 Det 62	A-3B	AG81x
VQ-1 Det	EA-3B	PRxx
HU-2 Det 62*	UH-2A	HUxx

*became HC-2 Det 62 on 01 Jul

Mediterranean/CVW-7

13 Jun 66–01 Feb 67

VF-41	F-4B	AG1xx
VF-84	F-4B	AG2xx
VMA-324	A-4E	AG3xx
VA-86	A-4E	AG4xx
VA-75	A-6A	AG5xx
RVAH-1	RA-5C	AG60x
VAW-12 Det 62	E-1B	AG73x
VQ-2 Det	EA-3B	JQxx
HC-2 Det 62	UH-2A	HUxx

Mediterranean/CVW-7

30 Apr 68–27 Jan 69

VF-41	F-4J	AG1xx
VF-84	F-4J	AG2xx
VA-76	A-4C	AG3xx

RVAH-7

VSF-1

VA-64

VAW-124

VAQ-33 Det 62

VAH-10 Det 62

VQ-2 Det

HC-2 Det 62

RA-5C

A-4C

A-4C

E-2A

EA-1F

KA-3B

EA-3B

UH-2B

AG40x

AG5xx

AG6xx

AG70x

AG73x

AGxx

JQxx

HUxx

North Atlantic/CVW-7

03 Sep–09 Oct 69

(NATO Peacekeeper)

VF-102	F-4J	AG1xx
VF-33	F-4J	AG2xx
VA-106	A-4C	AG3xx
VA-64	A-4C	AG6xx
RVAH-12	RA-5C	AG60x
VAW-122	E-2A	AG72x
VAH-10 Det 62	EKA-3B	AGxx
HC-2 Det 62	UH-2B	HUxx

Mediterranean/CVW-7

23 Jun 70–31 Jan 71

VF-102	F-4J	AG1xx
VF-33	F-4J	AG2xx
VMA-331	A-4E	AG3xx
VA-65	A-6A	AG5xx
HS-2	SH-3A	AG55x
RVAH-11	RA-5C	AG60x
VAW-122	E-2A	AG72x
VAH-10 Det 62*	KA-3B	AG40x

*became VAQ-129 on 01 Sep

North Atlantic/Med/CVW-7

(NATO Royal Knight)

16 Sep 71–16 Mar 72

VF-102	F-4J	AG1xx
VF-33	F-4J	AG2xx
VA-66	A-7E	AG3xx
VA-12	A-7E	AG4xx
VA-65	KA/A-6A/D	AG5xx
RVAH-12	RA-5C	AG60x
VAW-122	E-2A	AG72x
HS-6	SH-3A	AG80x
VQ-2 Det	EA-3B	JQxx

Mediterranean/CVW-7

21 Jun 73–19 Jan 74

VF-102	F-4J	AG1xx
VF-33	F-4J	AG2xx
VA-66	A-7E	AG3xx
VA-12	A-7E	AG4xx
VA-65	KA/A-6E/D	AG5xx
RVAH-14	RA-5C	AG60x
VAQ-130 Det 1	EKA-3B	AG61x
VAW-122	E-2B	AG72x
HS-5	SH-3D	AG80x
VS-28	S-2E	AG92x
VQ-2 Det	EA-3B	JQxx

Mediterranean/CVW-7

19 Jul 74–21 Jan 75

VF-102	F-4J	AG1xx
VF-33	F-4J	AG2xx
VA-66	A-7E	AG3xx
VA-12	A-7E	AG4xx
VA-65	KA/A-6E/D	AG5xx
RVAH-9	RA-5C	AG60x
VAQ-132	EA-6B	AG71x
VAW-122	E-2B	AG72x
HS-5	SH-3D	AG80x
VS-31	S-2G	AG83x
VQ-2 Det	EA-3B	JQxx

North Atlantic/Med/CVW-7

15 Oct 75–05 May 76

VF-102	F-4J	AG1xx
VF-33	F-4J	AG2xx
VA-66	A-7E	AG3xx
VA-12	A-7E	AG4xx
VA-65	KA/A-6E/D	AG5xx
RVAH-13	RA-5C	AG60x
VAQ-132	EA-6B	AG71x
VAW-117	E-2B	AG77x
HS-5	SH-3D	AG80x
VQ-2 Det	EA-3B	JQxx

Mediterranean/CVW-7

31 Mar–21 Oct 77

VAW-117	E-2B	AG01x
VF-102	F-4J	AG1xx
VF-33	F-4J	AG2xx
VA-66	A-7E	AG3xx
VA-12	A-7E	AG4xx
VA-65	KA/A-6E/D	AG5xx
RVAH-12	RA-5C	AG60x
VAQ-136	EA-6B	AG61x
VS-31	S-3A	AG7xx
HS-5	SH-3D	AG73x
VQ-2 Det	EA-3B	JQxx

Mediterranean/CVW-6

28 Jun 79–14 Dec 79

HS-15	SH-3H	AE00x
VF-102	F-4J	AE1xx
VF-33	F-4J	AE2xx
VA-15	A-7E	AE3xx
VA-87	A-7E	AE4xx
VA-176	KA/A-6E/D	AE5xx
VS-28	S-3A	AE6xx
VAQ-130	EA-6B	AE70x
VAW-122	E-2C	AE72x
VQ-2 Det	EA-3B	JQxx

Indian Ocean/Med/CVW-6

19 Nov 80–11 Jun 81

Same as previous cruise, except:

Plus:

VFP-63 Det 4 RF-8G AE61x

VAQ-131 EA-6B AE70x

Minus:

VAQ-130 EA-6B AE70x

Mediterranean/CVW-6

07 Jun–22 Dec 82

VF-14	F-14A	AE1xx
VF-32	F-14A	AE2xx
VA-15	A-7E	AE3xx
VA-87	A-7E	AE4xx
VA-176	KA/A-6E/D	AE5xx
VAQ-131	EA-6B	AE60x
VAW-122	E-2C	AE60x
HS-15	SH-3H	AE61x
VS-28	S-3A	AE7xx
VQ-2 Det	EA-3B	JQxx

Carib./Med/No. Atlantic/CVW-6

18 Oct 83–11 Apr 84

Same as previous cruise.

Med/Indian Ocean/CVW-6

16 Oct 84–19 Feb 85

Same as previous cruise.

Transit via Cape Horn/CVW-17

15 Aug–08 Oct 88

VFA-131	F/A-18A	AA1xx
VF-103	F-14A	AA2xx
VA-155	KA/A-6E/D	AA5xx
VAW-125	E-2C	AA60x
HS-3	SH-3H	AA61x
VS-30	S-3B	AA7xx
VRC-30 Det	C-2A	RW33

Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf/CVW-14

(Operation Desert Shield)

23 Jun–20 Dec 90

VF-154	F-14A	NK1xx
VF-21	F-14A	NK2xx
VFA-113	F/A-18C	NK3xx
VFA-25	F/A-18C	NK4xx
VA-196	A-6E	NK5xx
VAQ-139	EA-6B	NK60x
VAW-113	E-2C	NK60x
VS-37	S-3A	NK7xx
HS-8	SH-3H	NK61x
VRC-50 Det	C-2A	RG42x

Persian Gulf/CVW-5

(Operation Southern Watch)

15 Apr–13 Oct 92

VF-154	F-14A	NF1xx
VF-21	F-14A	NF2xx
VFA-192	F/A-18C	NF3xx
VFA-195	F/A-18C	NF4xx
VA-115	A-6E	NF5xx
VAW-115	E-2C	NF60x
HS-12	SH-3H	NF61x
VAQ-136	EA-6B	NF62x
VS-21	S-3B	NF7xx
VRC-50 Det	C-2A	RG4xx

Off Korea/CVW-5

(Exercise Team Spirit 93)

15 Feb–25 Mar 93

Same as previous cruise.

WestPac/CVW-5

11 May–01 Jul 93

Same as previous cruise, except:

Plus:

VQ-5 Det A ES-3A NF72x

Arabian Gulf/Somalia/CVW-5

(Operation Southern Watch)

17 Nov 93–17 Mar 94

Same as previous cruise.

Western Pacific/CVW-5

(Korean Crisis)

19 Jul–29 Aug 94

Same as previous cruise.

Persian Gulf/CVW-5

(Operation Southern Watch)

19 Aug–18 Nov 95

Same as previous cruise, except:

Plus:

HS-14 SH-60F NF61x

HH-60H NF61x

Minus:

HS-12

Western Pacific/CVW-5

(Taiwan/China tensions)

09 Feb–27 Mar 96

Same as previous cruise, except:

Minus:

VF-21

Indian Ocean/CVW-5

(Exercise Cobra Gold)

15 Feb–10 Jun 97

Same as previous cruise, except:

Plus:

VFA-27 F/A-18C NF2xx

Arabian Gulf/CVW-5

(Operation Southern Watch)

23 Jan–05 Jun 98

VF-154	F-14A	NF1xx
VFA-27	F/A-18C	NF2xx
VFA-192	F/A-18C	NF3xx
VFA-195	F/A-18C	NF4xx
VAW-115	E-2C	NF60x
HS-14	SH-60F	NF61x
	HH-60H	NF61x
VAQ-136	EA-6B	NF62x
VS-21	S-3B	NF7xx
VQ-5 Det 5	ES-3A	NF72x
VRC-30 Det 5	C-2A	NF43x

272 days. She completed a two-month overhaul upon her return in January 1969 and in September took part in the NATO exercise Peacekeeper in the North Atlantic.

Leaving Norfolk in June 1970, *Indy* and CVW-7 were bound for the Mediterranean once again. Aboard for the first time was an antisubmarine warfare (ASW) capability with the addition of Helicopter Antisubmarine Squadron 2. Following participation in exercises and an in-port period in Athens, Greece, *Independence* was underway in September north of the island of Crete when yet another crisis in the Middle East, this time in Jordan, required the ship to move 70 miles south of Cyprus to await developments. During the next month the Sixth Fleet would increase from two to three carriers as the fleet stood ready to carry out possible orders from the national command authority. The remainder of the deployment was routine and *Independence* returned in January 1971 to Norfolk. Another Mediterranean deployment, from September through March 1972, started with NATO exercise Royal Knight in the North Atlantic. One highlight of this cruise was cross-decking exercises with the British carrier HMS *Ark Royal* (R.09).

A 10-month major overhaul and upgrade at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard commenced in May. Upon completion *Indy* reflected the Navy's new multipurpose air, surface and ASW role for carriers and was redesignated from CVA to aircraft carrier (CV) on 28 February 1973. Ready to go again in June, *Indy's* CVW-7 added ASW squadron VS-28. Except for the Grumman E-2B *Hawkeyes* of Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron (VAW) 122, which were considered integral to all carrier operations, several aircraft and crews from each squadron were temporarily shore based over the course of the deployment.

The routine of another Mediterranean deployment was shattered on 6 October with Egypt's sudden strike across the Suez Canal and the Syrian thrust across the Golan Heights as the 1973 Yom Kippur War began. After an emergency sortie from Greece, *Indy* was on station south of Crete at 1000 on 7 October. By the end of the month *Franklin D. Roosevelt* (CVA 42) and *John F. Kennedy* (CVA 67) had joined *Indy*. Also during this period the Soviets deployed the largest number of ships ever to the eastern Mediterranean, placing the U.S. military worldwide on high alert. In response, *Indy* operated under total electronic silence for four days after



her early October departure from Athens. The deployment came to an end in January 1974.

An eight-year yard period at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard preceded March workup exercises in preparation for her 19 July 1974 departure for the Mediterranean. Following this deployment *Indy* was scheduled to report to her new home port of Athens, Greece, as part of a Navy initiative to base both a Sixth and Seventh Fleet carrier battle group at a forward-deployed location.

While events in the region were somewhat less tense than during the previous deployment, the long-simmering conflict between Greece and Turkey over the status of Cyprus finally ignited and *Indy* was called

upon to conduct contingency operations in support of the evacuation of foreign nationals from the island. This conflict, along with another Greek government coup, put *Indy's* home port change on hold. Following her return to Norfolk in January 1975, the agreement to home port a Sixth Fleet carrier in Greece was terminated on 29 April. The plan to forward deploy a Seventh Fleet carrier to Japan was successful, and *Indy* herself would fill this role later in her career.

Following the familiar routine of overhaul and upkeep, *Independence* was ready again for deployment in October. She first headed northward to engage in NATO exercises Magic Sword and Ocean Safari conducted in the North Sea and North Atlantic.

Indy entered the Mediterranean in December and was later called to conduct contingency operations in support of the possible evacuation of foreign nationals from war-torn Lebanon. The deployment ended in May 1976 with her return to Norfolk.

The 12th deployment to the Mediterranean was conducted from March to October 1977. Following a nine-month complex overhaul, *Independence* hosted Reserve Carrier Air Wing 20's annual two-week active duty for training in November 1978. As deployment workup exercises commenced in February 1979 *Indy* had her first change in assigned air wings since 1959, when CVW-6 came aboard in preparation for the upcoming Med cruise.

During the final stages of workups, history was made on 20 June when Lt. Donna L. Spruill of Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 40 became the first woman Naval Aviator to carrier qualify in a fixed wing aircraft, a C-1A *Trader*. Eight days later *Indy* was underway for the Mediterranean, returning on 14 December.

Independence began the new

decade in a familiar routine—preparing for deployment. As workups commenced in July 1980 political tensions in the Middle East were heating up. Departing Norfolk in November *Indy* headed southward and turned over with *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN 69) off the Cape of Good Hope on 8 December. After arriving in the Arabian Sea, contingency operations with *Ranger* (CV 61) commenced immediately. Still on station when the American hostages in Iran were released, *Indy* passed through the Suez Canal on 15 May and spent two additional weeks off Lebanon during the Israeli/Syrian missile crisis before ending the seven-month cruise in Norfolk in June. Only 9 days out of the 204 deployed had been spent in port.

Following another period of overhaul and upgrades, workups began again in February 1982 for another Mediterranean deployment from June through December. Deploying as a dual carrier battle group with *Forrestal* (CV 59), *Indy* left on 7 June for the Middle East, which was again in a state of flux. Following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, a U.S.-brokered agreement provided for the evacuation of the Palestine Liberation Organization from Beirut and the landing of a U.S. Marine Corps expeditionary force. The carriers were tasked with providing continuous air and surface coverage for the operations.

Although more than half of the deployment was spent on station off Lebanon, the carrier also conducted operations near Libya. This prompted numerous Libyan reactions, some in the form of fighters which would test American resolve until intercepted by *Indy*'s F-14A *Tomcats* under E-2C *Hawkeye* direction. *Independence* arrived in Norfolk on 22 December.

Another "routine" Mediterranean deployment in late 1983 was quickly shelved two days after the *Indy* battle group left Norfolk on 18 October due



An A-7E Corsair II bristles with 19,000 pounds of ordnance as it prepares to launch from *Independence* during carrier suitability evaluation of the attack bomber's load-carrying capacity.

to a coup in Grenada led by a Marxist group with ties to Cuba.

Independence was diverted for 12 days of contingency operations in the Caribbean as American citizens were evacuated and stability in the area restored. Completing Operation Urgent Fury, the *Indy* battle group left for the Mediterranean and more time on station near Lebanon following the deadly suicide truck bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks there on 23 October. After taking up station in late November, *Independence* engaged in combat operations. On 3 December, aircraft from *Indy* and *John F. Kennedy* (CV 67) attacked Syrian SAM sites and antiaircraft gun emplacements that had fired upon U.S. reconnaissance aircraft.

Independence celebrated her 25th birthday on 10 January 1984 while enjoying a restful port visit in Naples, Italy. Following the withdrawal of U.S. personnel from Lebanon in February 1984, *Indy* departed the Mediterranean in March and headed into the North Atlantic to participate in NATO exercise Teamwork before returning home on 11 April.

Following a very short turnaround period, *Indy* departed on 16 October for a split Mediterranean/Indian Ocean deployment. This, however, would be a relatively short four-month cruise as the carrier was due for extensive overhaul. She returned to Norfolk on 19 February 1985 to the news that she had earned the annual Atlantic Fleet Battle Efficiency ("Battle E") Award for 1984.

On 17 April 1985 *Indy* entered Philadelphia Naval Shipyard to begin her three-year Service Life Extension Program (SLEP). A cross between new construction and a comprehensive overhaul, SLEP was designed to add 15 additional years to the life of the first-generation *Forrestal*-class aircraft carriers. On 15 August an almost-new *Independence* departed Norfolk, her home of 29 years, for her new home port of San Diego, Calif., where she arrived on 8 October after traveling around South America with CVW-17 aboard.

An extended period of training and exercises followed for "Freedom's Flagship" and finally on 23 June 1990, with CVW-14 embarked, she



Left, *Independence* waits at the ready during the interdiction of an Iraqi vessel on 12 August 1990, during Operation Desert Shield. Two years later her embarked air wing, CVW-5, began the air patrols that marked the beginning of Operation Southern Watch, the enforcement of the no-fly zone over southern Iraq. Below, ordnancemen ready a laser-guided bomb aboard a VA-115 A-6E *Intruder* prior to a Southern Watch mission.

departed for her first extended deployment in five years. This “routine” western Pacific and Indian Ocean cruise came to an end on 2 August with word that Iraq had invaded Kuwait. Already steaming toward Diego Garcia, B.I.O.T., the battle group was ordered to change course to the Gulf of Oman. Within five days, *Indy* was on station and began immediate flight operations to ensure Saddam Hussein did not continue into Saudi Arabia.

With Operation Desert Shield underway, *Indy* entered the Arabian Gulf on 2 October, transiting the Strait of Hormuz—the first transit by an aircraft carrier since *Constellation* (CVA 64) in November 1974. Flight operations were conducted until departure on the 4th. Following relief by *Midway* (CVA 41), *Indy* returned to San Diego on 20 December, having set the stage for combat operations conducted in Operation Desert Storm.

The last home port change for *Independence* took place in 1991 when she replaced *Midway* as the Navy’s only permanently forward-deployed carrier. Departing San Diego on 5 August *Indy* met *Midway* at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, to swap personnel and aircraft. She arrived at Yokosuka, Japan, on 11 September, now with CVW-5 embarked. For the next seven years “Freedom’s Flagship” would make frequent cruises in sup-



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port of national policy and respond to multiple crises on short notice.

On 21 March 1992 *Independence* departed Subic Bay, R.P., the last carrier to do so before the base closed. From 15 April to 13 October she deployed to the Arabian Gulf. On 27 August CVW-5 aircraft initiated Operation Southern Watch, the multinational mission to monitor Iraqi compliance with the 1991 Gulf War cease-fire provisions, by patrolling the “no-fly zone” below the 32nd parallel.

During the first half of 1993 the *Indy*/CVW-5 team made two cruises in the western Pacific region, and from 17 November to 17 March 1994

she again was deployed to the Arabian Gulf in support of Operation Southern Watch as well as a short period of contingency operations off war-torn Somalia. In mid-1994 she made an emergency cruise to operate off Korea as tensions mounted due to North Korea’s refusal to allow international inspections of its nuclear facilities.

The 36-year old *Independence* became the oldest commissioned ship in the Navy’s active fleet on 30 June 1995. With this distinction, “Freedom’s Flagship” proudly displayed the Revolution-era First Navy Jack from her bow. From 19 August

to 18 November 1995 she deployed for the third time to the Arabian Gulf for Southern Watch operations. The first of three short cruises in 1996 involved monitoring Chinese missile exercises off the coast of Taiwan from 9 February to 27 March.

From 15 February to 10 June 1997 *Indy* and CVW-5 continued operating in the region, ranging as far as the Indian Ocean. She earned her second annual Battle "E" award, this time as a member of the Pacific Fleet.

As 1998 began, the 39-year-old carrier's final cruise was meant to be a leisurely tour of southeast Asian garden spots, such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand, before decommissioning in September. That changed, however, when tensions once again increased in the Arabian Gulf region due to continuing Iraqi violations of the cease-fire. On 23

January *Indy* departed Yokosuka for the gulf, where she relieved *Nimitz* (CVN 68) and commenced Southern Watch flight operations. Upon return to Yokosuka on 5 June, "Freedom's Flagship" had completed her last operational deployment in defense of the national interests of the United States.

Departing Yokosuka for the last time on 7 July, *Indy* carried CVW-5 for turnover with *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63), which would take her place as the Navy's permanently forward-deployed carrier. Thus, one day out from Pearl Harbor, on 15 July *Independence* conducted flight operations for the last time. An E-2C *Hawkeye* of VAW-115, piloted by Lt. Brent A. Johnson and crewed by *Indy* CO Capt. Mark R. Milliken and air wing commander Capt. Richard O. McHarg, recorded *Indy's* 363,607th—and last—arrested landing.

Formal turnover was conducted on 18 July, with personnel and aircraft being swapped and CVW-5 reporting aboard *Kitty Hawk*. "Freedom's Flagship" made her final departure from Pearl Harbor on the 24th. After a brief stop at San Diego to offload aircraft, she docked on 6 August, for the last time, at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, Wash.

On 30 September, accompanied by the pomp and ceremony due her proud record, *Independence's* commissioning pennant was hauled down and her deck log closed out, her proud service to freedom completed. ✈

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LCdr. Richard Berne



Farewell, Indy . . .

